WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY - Founded December 17, 1857

APRIL 1981

WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

NORTHFIELD TOWNSHIP SOCIETY ORGANIZED

Fifty persons became charter members of the new Northfield Township Historical Society when it was organized March 31.

Wystan Stevens presented a program on the Ann Arbor Railroad in Northfield township and Louis A. Humpert, a Whitmore Lake history buff, presented the Society with its first artifact, a picnic table, well-carved with old names, that he fished out of the lake.

Elected to the board besides Humpert were Eleanor Halterman, Dr. N.W. Boughner, Karl Ehnis, Cecil Warner, Rusty Towers, Nancy Liddell, Tom O'Brien, Peter Kelley, Mike Krebill and Ralph Leland.

COBBLESTONE FARM PLANS 'SHEEP TO SHAWL' CONTEST

The Cobblestone Farm spring festival from 1--5 p.m. Sunday, May 17, will feature a "sheep to shawl" contest in which teams of four workers will create a shawl from newly sheared wool.

There will be prizes for the first team done and for merit. Other activities will include blacksmith and plowing demonstrations at the farm at 2781 Packard Road. In case of rain, it will be postponed to the 24th.

WATERLOO, JACKSON BOOKS ADDED TO COLLECTION

Two books of local historical interest donated for the auction were reserved by curator John C. Dann for the WCHS collections — an 1894 Jackson County atlas and *The Settling of Waterloo, Michigan* by retired Professor Donald Katz. The Waterloo book was given by Ulrich's Books, Inc. Unfortunately we did not get the name of the atlas donor.

GERALD R. FORD LIBRARY PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE MAY 3

The public is invited to an open house at the new Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library on the U-M North Campus from 1--4 p.m. Sunday, May 3. The library at 1000 Beal Avenue is next to Bentley Historical Library and across Glacier Way from the VA Hospital.

The building, which houses the records of the first U.S. President from Michigan, will be formally dedicated April 27 at an invitational event.

Open house visitors may take self-guided tours of the building including Mr. Ford's office. There will be exhibits of his China visits of 1972 and 1975

An animated award-winning film on the National Archives will be shown. The National Archives, which administers the library, is now headed by Dr. Robert M. Warner, former director of Bentley Library.

WILL YOU HELP WITH ART FAIR ACTIVITIES?

The next big fund raising event for WCHS is the Art Fair activities July 22--25 made possible by Great Lakes Federal Savings.

WCHS receives proceeds from renting spaces to artists under the Liberty Street portico at Great Lakes, as well as booth space to sell pop and the privilege of renting out parking spaces in the Great Lakes lot when the business is closed evenings and Saturday.

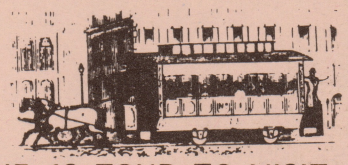
Volunteers are needed to staff the pop stand and manage and staff the parking lot concession. If you are willing to help a couple of hours please call Rosalie Collie, 769-8530 (office) or 995-3127 (home).

TAKE YELLOW BRICK ROAD SOMEWHERE OVER RAINBOW TO APRIL WCHS MEETING

"The Wonderful Wizard of Oz" isn't just a children's story — at least not to Professor Gerald Linderman of the University of Michigan history department.

He will talk about "The Wizard of Oz as Social Commentary" at the Washtenaw County Historical Society meeting at 8 p.m. Thursday, April 23, at the Salvation Army, 100 Arbana at West Huron Street, Ann Arbor.

The children's classic was written in 1900 by Lyman Frank Baum, an American journalist and storywriter. Professor Linderman will look into the historical roots of the story and tie it in with political events of the time.



JUNE 13 TOUR TO VISIT SOUTH OF (OHIO) BORDER

A few miles south of the Ohio border, just up the Maumee River from Toledo, Americans battled in 1794 at Fallen Timbers and in 1813 at Fort Meigs against Indians and British from Detroit to secure more of the Northwest Territory for settlement.

The 1981 WCHS bus tour will visit the Fallen Timbers site and restored Fort Meigs on Saturday, June 13. A meal is planned at the 1828 Columbian House restaurant at nearby Waterville.

Also planned is a visit to Wolcott House pioneer museum in Maumee and a look at Toledo architecture as sleuthed out by Wystan Stevens.

Please mark your calendar. Further details in May issue.

1876 Farm Ran on Real Horsepower But Henry Ford Changed All That

At the March WCHS meeting Peter Cousins used one particular "unremarkable" farm in southeast Michigan in 1876 to show what farming was like a century ago and how one "product" of that farm revolutionized agriculture as well as American life.

"What is remarkable is that we know a great deal about this particular farm and what was going on in this particular year because it happened to be the birthplace and boyhood home of a very remarkable person — Henry Ford."

"In the late 'teens, Henry Ford did a great deal of research about his boyhood home," explained Cousins who is curator of agricultural collections at Henry Ford Museum. In 1919, Ford painstakingly restored the house to its appearance in 1876, the year of his mother's death."

The farm was located at what is today the intersection of Ford and Greenfield Roads, an area known as the Scotch Settlement because in the 1830's it was settled by people of Scottish and Ulster Irish origins.

Henry's father, William, born in County Cork, Ireland, in 1826, emigrated to Michigan in 1847 with his family and settled near Dearborn-ville where Ford relatives had lived since 1832.

William helped his father carve a farm out of the wilderness and then worked as a laborer on the Michigan Central Railroad until it reached Lake Michigan in 1849, when he returned to the farm. In 1858, his father retired and the 80 acre farm was divided between William and his brother, Samuel.

In 1861 William married Mary Litogot O'Hearn, an orphan raised on the nearby 91 acre O'Hearn farm. He sold his farm and moved in with them. They immediately began to build the seven-room house which today is in Greenfield Village. By 1876 a four-room addition had been added.

Knowledge about the farm is in large part due to a series of reminiscences gathered after Henry Ford became famous, especially from his younger sister, Margaret Ford Ruddiman, Cousins noted.

By 1876, William had purchased additional surrounding land to have a total of about 150 acres. The average Wayne county farm then was 70 acres, in Washtenaw, 112 acres.

"There was probably about 40 acres of unimproved land — most of William's life he earned a considerable income cutting and selling cordwood for burning in stoves in Detroit. Probably about 20 acres was in orchards or permanent pasture. The remaining 90 acres of till land would never all be in cultivation at any one time. A three-part rotation system was generally used in which one third of the land would be lying fallow or in a crop such as clover to regain its fertility."

"Farmers contemptously referred to progressive sorts of farmers with the term "book farmer'. William Ford was anything but a book or gentleman farmer," Cousins said. He showed a picture of "his rather modest library (in a small 3 shelf bookcase) containing among other things farm reports, religious tracts and books on the history of the British Isles."

In 1876 after his wife's death in childbirth, "William Ford journeyed to the Philadelphia centennial exposition, the greatest event of its kind in the 19th century, where he became particularly impressed by a number of very modern farming methods."

The most important crop on the Ford farm was hay. It was not simply fed on the farm but there was a large market for it in Detroit to feed the urban horse population of drayage firms, livery stables, etc.

Most hay grasses and legumes are perennial so that seeding is not necessary every year but when it was, seed was broadcast. Ford acquired a seeder similar to one he remembered for the museum collection. It was made by O.E. Thompson Co. of Ypsilanti.

By 1876 the Ford farm used a horsedrawn mowing machine rather than scythes to cut hay. "The mowing machine is an adaptation of the reaper which has a reciprocating cutting mechanism run along the side of the machine that is operated by gearing and drawn by horses.

"It was one of a number of devices that became popular during the decade of the Civil War and which are regarded by historians as constituting a first revolution in American agriculture. The muscle power of animals was being harnessed through machines to do work that was previously done by hand."

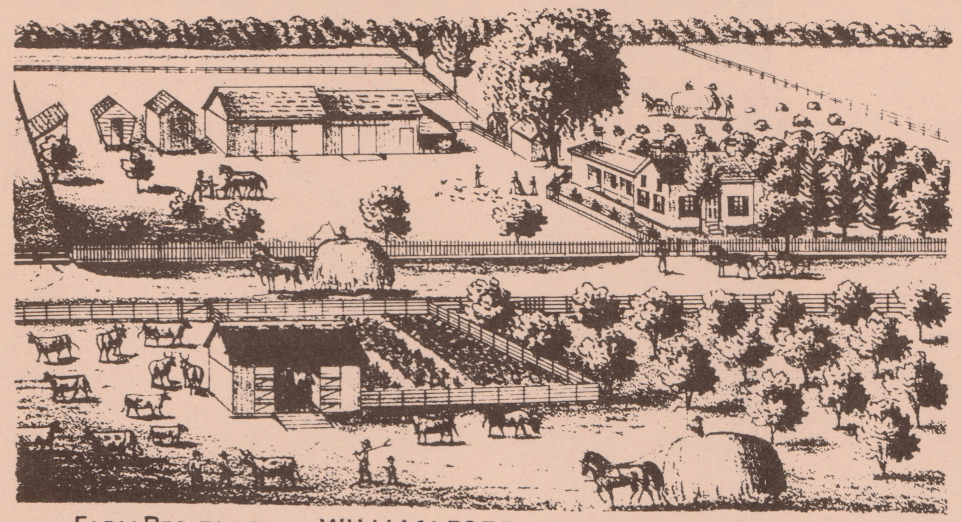
"The cut grass had to be raked into windrows or long piles in the field to cure in the sun. Earlier a wooden handrake was used but by the 1870's practically any farmer had a horsedrawn rake which drew the cut hay into continuous swaths.

"After having cured in the sun and been tossed and turned to be uniformly cured, it was loaded onto a wagon and hauled to the barn for storage.

"If the hay was fed on the farm, it was stacked or stored in bulk in the haymow in the barn. To be shipped, it was often baled. "A picture showed a group of farmers near Maple Rapids baling hay with a large upright hay press activated by a team of horses.

"The next crop in importance in terms of land devoted to it and value were small grains. In Wayne county, oats was far more important than wheat, in Washtenaw, just the opposite. Oats were needed to feed urban horses in Detroit.

"Small grains were planted al-



FARM RESIDENCE OF WILLIAM FORD. ESQ; SPRINGWELL, WAYNE CO; MICH.

Courtesy of Henry Ford Museum

A boy of 12 on this farm in 1876 had a lot to do with driving horses off the farm and turning this bucolic scene into the busy urban intersection of Ford and Greenfield Roads of today.

most universally then with a grain drill, a machine that measured a certain amount of grain into tubes that ran down from the hopper. The drill opens tiny furrows, the seed is deposited and trailing chains cover the furrows. The machine ran from gearing off the axle.

"Traditionally small grains were harvested with cradle scythes, a variant of the grass scythe with wooden fingers paralleling the blade. The blade cut the grain and in the backstroke the grain was deposited on the ground in a neat pile off the fingers.

"But by the 1870's the Ford farm was thoroughly mechanized. The most symbolic farm machine of the 19th century, the reaper, was very much at work." A picture showed Henry Ford riding on a self-raking reaper of 1873.

"The wooden slats on the large reel revolve and draw grain into the cutting mechanism and about every third or fourth rotation of that reel a rake would sweep across the platform under the reel and deposit the cut grain on the ground. Following behind, men would bind the grain into sheaves. They would be stacked in shocks in the field until loaded onto a wagon and taken to the barn for protection.

Threshing traditionally took place in the wintertime. It was done with a flail, a wooden club on a swivel head and the grain tossed in the air with a winnowing basket or bedsheet, the wind separating the chaff from the heavier grain.

A horsepower treadmill threshing machine was used at the Ford farm. The thresher is basically a powered revolving cylinder containing spiked teeth. The grain is fed in and as the spikes mesh tightly together, the grain is torn apart.

Individual farmers did not own their own threshing machine. William Ford's brother operated one on a custom basis in the neighborhood. The last model he had was a heavy cast iron machine with five sweeps to which could be hitched ten horses which were driven around in a circle to power a rather elaborately geared mechanism. Off the mechanism, a drive shaft, much like in an auto, connects to the threshing machine and operates it.

But by the 1870's, horsedrawn machines were beginning to fade away to steam power. Henry Ford was most aware of this change. He said in *My Life and Work,* "The biggest event of those early years was meeting with a road engine (in 1876). I was then 12 years old . . . It was the first vehicle other than horsedrawn that I'd ever seen . . . I was off the wagon and talking with the engineer before my father who was driving knew what I was up to . . .It was that engine that took me into automotive transportation."

The next most important crop was corn. It was fed entirely on the farm to livestock — the dairy herd of about 20 Ayrshire cows and, to some extent, to horses, sheep and hogs. It was cut by hand with a corn knife and stacked in schocks in the field to dry. Unlike wheat, there was no danger of it being damaged by weather. In late fall it would be husked either in the field or hauled close to where livestock were kept, husked there and the stalks fed as dry fodder.

During the 1860's Wayne County was an important wool producing area and Washtenaw County the most important in the state. Michigan ranked fourth in the nation. This was partly due to the Civil War when southern sources of cotton fiber were cut off. But by the 1870's, sheep production in Michigan was dwindling because of competition from the west and the Ford farm had only a few sheep.

Small amounts of poultry were raised, mainly for eggs. Traditionally their care was women's and children's work and earnings from the sale of eggs was pin money.

Some market garden crops were raised, particularly potatoes and onions. Cousins showed a picture of a cultivator made in Jackson, Michigan, that was used on the farm for these row crops.

Henry Ford hated and despised farming. He left the farm as quickly as he could when he was 16 in 1879. A hired hand on the Ford farm in 1876 later wrote, "You know, that little devil was the laziest buggar on the face of the earth . . .Henry would work along all right until about 10 a.m. and then he would want to go to the house for a drink of water. He would go all right and get the water but never come back."

As Henry himself put it, "From the beginning I could never work up much enthusiasm for the labor of farming." He hated chickens, cows and horses.

Soon after he founded the Ford Motor Company in the early 1900's

he began experimenting with what he called an automobile plow. A 1908 view showed him on such a machine made from a combination of Ford auto parts, artillery wheels and grain binder wheels.

He introduced an extremely successful light tractor, the Fordson, during World War I. Overnight it revolutionized American agriculture. In 1920 when this machine was first being sold widely, the U.S. horse population reached its apex at about 20 million. By 1954, the Census Bureau had stopped counting horses.

PRESERVING NEIGHBORHOODS TOPIC OF EMU PROGRAMS

Preservation Eastern, an Eastern Michigan University student group, will sponsor three public panel discussions during National Historic Preservation Week May 10--16. The 1981 theme is "Conservation: Keeping America's Neighborhoods Together".

The programs at 7:30 p.m. at Starkweather Hall on the EMU campus will be "Organizing A Neighborhood Preservation Group," Monday, May 11; "Funding Neighborhood Preservation," May 12; and "Planning and Implementing Neighborhood Goals," May 13. Refreshments will be served.

The group is composed mainly of graduate students in EMU's degree program in historic preservation.

WCHS SUPPORTS AAHDC PLANS FOR KEMPF HOUSE

The WCHS Board of Directors went on record in support of Ann Arbor Historic District Commission plans to restore the studio of Kempf House, 312 South Division Street, to its appearance from about 1910--1940 when the Kempfs had it plus other changes.

The WCHS action also advised AAHDC of the Society's continued interest in protection of its items on display at Kempf house.

GSWC SPEAKERS NAMED

Alloa Anderson will speak on "How to Join An Hereditary Society" at the Genealogy Society of Washtenaw County meeting at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, April 26 at Washtenaw Community College. Harold Jones will discuss "Collection and Use of Cemetery Records" at the 1 p.m. class.

Because of Memorial Day, the GSWC May meeting will be the 17th. Dave Pollock will talk on "300 Years of American Newspapers". Officers will be elected.

PLAN ANTIQUES APPRAISAL

Two experts will appraise antiques brought in by the audience at the May 28 meeting. They are James Babcock, a seller and appraiser of antique books, formerly of Birmingham's Stalker and Boos, and Demaris Cash of Ann Arbor's Treasure Mart.

HISTORICAL HAPPENINGS

Chelsea Historical Society — 7:30 p.m. second Monday, McKune Memorial Library, Architectural survey of Chelsea to begin in May, co-sponsored with EMU.

Dexter Historical Society — Board meeting, 8 p.m. Thursday, May 7, at museum, 3443 Inverness.

Manchester Historical Society — Joint meeting with Clinton Historical Society at Bridgewater Township Hall, 8 p.m., April 27. Program on history of Palmer family, long-time township residents.

Milan Historical Society — 7:30 p.m. third Wednesday at Hack House, 775 County Street.

Saline Historical Society — 2 p.m. Sunday, May 17, in Senior Citizens Room at City Services Center on Maple Road. Film, "Stations" about adaptive reuses of railroad stations.

Webster Historical Society — 7:45 p.m. first Monday at Webster Church, 5484 Webster Church Road.

Ypsilanti Historical Society — Ernest Griffen's collection of insulators on exhibit at museum. Museum hours 3--5 p.m. Friday--Sunday.

NO PLANT SALE PLANNED

The WCHS board has decided not to hold a plant sale in September.

Editor: Alice Ziegler, 663-8826
Keylining: Anna Thorsch

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETING

8:00 p.m. THURSDAY APRIL 23, 1981

SALVATION ARMY

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